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THE INDUSTRIAL TRAINING OF WOMEN

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In the development of industry the most radical changes that have been wrought are those which have to do with the place and methods of production, and these changes have their greatest significance in the field of education, making the plea for industrial training one of the strongest pleas of our modern educational system. While the concentration of production and the principle of subdivision of labor have meant a manifold increase in the amount of product, they have brought incalculable harm to the producer. We have been suddenly aroused to the fact that industry is on a very unstable basis if this deterioration of producer goes on, and we are beginning also to take the still larger view and to see that civilization itself is on an unstable basis, if human beings are to be sacrificed to things.

If we see the need of industrial training solely from the standpoint of maintaining our industrial supremacy as a nation, then the all-important emphasis must be placed on the training of men that they may attain greater industrial skill and intelligence—but if we look at the subject from the viewpoint of the larger needs of our civilization, then the industrial training of women is of equal importance with that of men, if not indeed of greater importance. In no one of the great educational institutions has there been so significant a change as in the home, and this has affected woman far more than man.

One cannot look back into the history of civilization without seeing that the modern woman at work in industry is by no means an interloper, but that she is doing under adverse conditions of present times what her feminine ancestors conceived, developed and saw taken away from them. The “sphere” of woman’s activity has changed from the home to the factory, and the necessity which formerly prompted her to create has changed to the necessity which now prompts her to earn, that she may buy what is already created. This complication of home and industry makes the task of those

who are dealing with woman's training a peculiarly difficult one. No one contradicts the claim that the ideal of education for men is training for citizenship, and one would be considered altogether impractical if he asserted that in giving a boy training to be a first-class lawyer, a first-class mechanic, or a first-class bootblack, he was conflicting in any way with this ideal. It is easy to see that this ideal must come through definite training for a profession or trade in accord with his tastes and needs, one which will develop in him those qualities of heart and mind which the state demands of its citizens.

Citizenship as expressed in an intelligent care of the home is the ideal for the girl. May not it, too, be reached by training her for some definite work in accord with her needs and her tastes, and so develop in her those qualities of womanhood which society requires? As a boy reaches the ideal of citizenship in thousands of different ways and through a multitude of activities, so, too, a girl must reach the ideal through the variety of opportunities which life presents. We shall have better homes when every woman is trained to be a thoroughly competent teacher, designer, dressmaker, cook or what not, just as we shall have a better state and nation when every man is trained to be a thoroughly competent doctor, mechanic, barber or bootblack, because, through this training, habits of industry and definite aims and purposes will be developed which will make a finer type of character in both man and woman.

Industrial training for men has come to be a recognized need, and the field of its application is as broad as the world. On the other hand, while industrial training for women in so far as it is applied to the obvious activities of the home is hailed with delight, any specific training to place girls in skilled trades has at present more enemies than friends. "Women ought not to be in factories and workshops; they ought to be in their homes," too often dismisses the subject, as if that settled the whole question. For us who are women and who work with women, the matter is not so easily adjusted, for we realize that, regardless of what ought to be, existing conditions make such a state of things far from possible.

The term "industrial education for women" is used indiscriminately to refer to training for the varied activities of the home and to specialized training for some particular industry. While in a broad sense both are industrial, the two phases are quite distinct

and must be approached in quite different ways. It is in the narrow sense, the sense of training for a definite trade, that I shall attempt to discuss the subject, and in doing so I shall try to show that such training is of the utmost importance from the standpoint of both industry and home.

What are some of the facts about women for whom the demand for trade training is being made? In most of our states the law requires all children to be in school until they are fourteen years of age. We have no statistics which give us information about girls between fourteen and sixteen years of age, but we know from scattered reports of various schools that in all large manufacturing centers only a very small percentage of girls remain in school after the compulsory attendance is completed. We have, however, figures which show that in many of the largest cities from fifty to seventy-nine per cent of women between the ages of sixteen and twenty are employed in gainful occupations outside the home. This number would be greatly increased if our figures included the fourteen- to sixteen-year-old girls who are not in school, but who are drifting about from one unskilled occupation to another. These are the women to whom our schools are not appealing. These are the women who are flooding our industries with unskilled, uninterested, unthoughtful labor, and these are the women who are to be the mistresses of our future homes. What are these women meaning to the industries and of what significance is their training?

Of the three hundred and three industries classified in our national census women are found to be employed in all but two. It might seem at first glance that the field of opportunity for women is widening. However, an intensive study of the industries would show that these opportunities are more apparent than real. While women are being admitted to a larger variety of industries, the minute subdivision of processes in all kinds of work really means that they are employed more and more in the unskilled occupations which have now become a part of all industries. It is a widening of woman's territory without giving her greater opportunity for advancement. In many of the large factories women become the packers and sorters. In the mills they are doffers and spinners. In the shoe and glove industry they stitch, glue, sew on buttons and perform various other semi-skilled processes. But we do not find them as lasters or cutters of shoes. We do not find them as designers

or drawers-in in the mills. We do not find them in the skilled work even in our factories which deal with confectionery and numerous other food products. They are having a greater number of chances to work, but fewer chances to become truly skilful workers.

It is, therefore, important to keep in mind these changes in women's occupations which have been brought about by the evolution of industry in order to discover the significance of training. First: what is the lack of training meaning to skilled industries? Take, for example, the dressmaking trade. What effect has the untrained work of women upon that trade? Statistics are not needed to prove that the standard of our product is not as high as it ought to be. Our stores are flooded with garments poorly made, poorly designed and showing altogether a lack of understanding regarding materials, color combinations and fitness. The ability to originate is not found among our workers, so that practically all of our models in the great clothing industries are brought from foreign countries, where much emphasis is laid on training. This must mean that such industries are maintained at an excessive expense. Then, too, to secure workers in these skilled trades entails a constant economic waste. Many who might be most valuable are never known to the industry because they have never had the opportunity to discover their own talents. Trained workers would be of immense profit to the industry, while now the endeavor to discover good workers and the cost of training those who seek entrance to the trade, regardless of fitness, result in a serious loss. If women were trained for these industries, we should have a higher standard of product, a better supply of labor, a lessening of expense in the cost of production, and an ability to pay fairer wages and to sell at more reasonable figures.

The untrained status of women has, too, its bad effect upon industries where the introduction of machinery has brought about a very great division of processes and where production is conducted on a large scale. Many such industries are in themselves skilled, but contain numerous occupations which require little training to perform what may be called a semi-skilled process. The effect upon the industry of such semi-skilled workers is shown by a steady shifting of employees and a constant breaking in of new workers, resulting in an economic waste. Moreover, a girl, not knowing the relation of her particular task to other parts of the work, per-

forms it in a disinterested and usually unintelligent manner, sometimes incurring heavy financial losses, in the way of damage to materials and machinery. A mill owner once said to me, "A girl who was trained to do her work would know better than to leave a pin in her cloth while weaving, which means hundreds of dollars' damage to a piece of delicate machinery."

In such industries as the shoe and glove industry, where the skilled work is done by men, and where the standard of product is dependent upon their efforts, the effect of untrained women workers in semi-skilled occupations is not so marked, but in the manufacture of clothing, which is primarily dependent upon the taste and originality of women, we shall always have an inferior product unless women are trained.

What is true of the semi-skilled work is true to a more marked degree in industries where processes performed by women are wholly unskilled. Women in unskilled occupations require a large amount of supervision, they take no serious attitude toward their work and no interest in helping to make the industry successful. They are shifting and unstable to a degree which has its effect upon both the amount and kind of product.

It is in connection with these unskilled occupations, where there are many thousands of young girl workers who are thinking of nothing but the few dollars they can earn, that we have one of our most difficult industrial and social problems. It is here that we must place the responsibility for much of woman's unfitness for the home. It is here that we see most clearly what the lack of training means. If we look at any large manufacturing city, the hopelessness of the situation presents itself. In many of our cities more than three-fourths of the girls are receiving no schooling beyond the grammar grades, but are entering factories and workshops with no other thought than to earn enough to supply their immediate needs. Victims as they are of industrial changes which have taken away their chances of development, they are commencing life without any knowledge of its meaning. Girls of the present day know nothing of the necessity to create, which came to their mothers and grandmothers before all the processes of production became a part of the great factory system and the home was supplied with its every need "ready made." Little in their lives is contributing to their industrial sense. If they begin work at the close of their grammar school

period, it cannot be of a nature to require skill and judgment, but must be merely a mechanical repetition of some process—a matter of running errands, tending a machine or some similar occupation, promising nothing in the future.

What is the relation of such an occupation to a girl's future home? It determines first of all her social scale and the type of man she will probably marry. Her companionship is limited to men who, like herself, are unskilled workers or who are of shiftless and irresponsible character; this is not alone because of her grade of occupation, but because of her scale of living.

It too frequently means the undermining of a girl's physical constitution, not always because the occupation in itself is harmful, but more often because she does not know how to approach her work in an intelligent way. Sometimes it is a matter of workroom conditions, which a trained person might help to improve, but often it is a lack of knowledge regarding the needs and care of the body. A willingness to work among unclean surroundings and in bad air, a readiness to eat unwholesome and non-nutritious food, and the necessity of seeking pleasure at night, to counteract the dull monotony of routine work, result in the absolute ruin of many a girl's physical constitution.

The effect of unskilled occupations upon woman's general intellectual development is manifold. The fact that unskilled processes require little or no thought inevitably brings about a deterioration of mind resulting from lack of use. Where there is no incentive to thought there is neither conscious nor unconscious growth, but mental stagnation. It is impossible for a girl to become generally intelligent and efficient if she spends the most formative years of her life amid surroundings which are powerless to arouse her ambitions and which too frequently deaden her finer sensibilities.

Not only are unskilled girl workers stunted in their growth physically and intellectually, but circumstances which make this possible too often result in a still more serious situation. The closed door of opportunity ahead, the wage usually too small to furnish the bare necessities of life and the apathy resulting from monotonous labor prevent the cultivation of any ethical sense, and tend to make girls careless and reckless regarding their moral standards.

These stultifying effects incident to women's employment in unskilled work have their obvious bearing upon the home. The

majority of girls in this walk of life marry and have homes of their own, but what sort of homes can we expect girls to make when the years of preparation have been spent in this fashion? Must we accept the situation as unchangeable? If not, what can be done to better it? Women have always worked. Women must always work if they are to attain their highest and best development. The question is not, shall we keep them out of workshops and factories, but with what training shall we have them enter? Not how shall we strengthen the home under ideal conditions, but how shall we improve it under existing conditions?

We hear much in these days about home training. Its advocates are invading our colleges, our high schools and even our grammar grades, whether rightly or wrongly I cannot say. In general, I believe that every girl ought to have an opportunity to know as much as she cares to know about all subjects pertaining to home management, whether she has but one year or eight to devote to its study. In general, too, I believe that the time to lay the foundation for domestic tastes is in the years between the kindergarten and the high school. But I am not among those who believe that such training, even if offered universally, will be as far-reaching as it should be, nor that it will strike at the root of the difficulty. It would be interesting to discover how schools of this kind would affect the situation in manufacturing centers, where now seventy per cent or more of all the women of high school and college age are at work.

Industrial training for women, if it is to serve its highest and best purpose, should somehow reach the women and girls who do and who must work. It must not deal with them on any sentimental plane of what may or may not be their future; it must deal with them on the plane of their present needs, and, without sacrificing the ideal, train them to do well whatever work they care to undertake. If they can devote but one year to learning something which will admit them to a skilled industry, this opportunity should be given them. It is a gain if the year of training results in acquisition of even the lowest grade of technical skill, for it has given the chance for many an inspiration, and it has helped the girl to take the "next step" intelligently.

Among unskilled women workers there are many who would rank among the highly skilled if they could have had the opportunity

for training in early life. There are, moreover, thousands of girls who are yearly swelling the number of unskilled workers because schools are not fitting them for anything better, while the level of those who, regardless of opportunity, would still be unskilled, would be decidedly raised if they could receive even the minimum of training.

The experience I have had in teaching trades to girls who would otherwise go to work as soon as they could withdraw from public school has strengthened my belief that this training has had a beneficial effect upon the home, although having as its distinct aim preparation for some special trade. It has opened their eyes to the needs of their physical well-being; it has stimulated them to higher ideals of companionship; it has helped them to take keener pleasure in their work and to seek ways of advancement. Moreover, the opportunity to earn a higher wage has increased their self-respect and raised their standard of living. The ability to do well even a minor grade of work has broadened the girl's interest, and has given her a technical efficiency which she can turn to account in the household.

By raising the standard of health, cleanliness and morality, by stimulating interest in learning to do something which requires exercise of the mind, by giving sufficient technical skill to insure opportunities of advancement, and by making possible a wage sufficient to maintain self-respect, that home which most needs attention is being reached—and reached most effectively,